

Minutes of Committee Meeting

Wednesday 5th February 2025 at 5.45pm in Quay House, Kingsbridge



1. Welcome & Apologies

Present:	James Spencer Scot Baston John Gardner Nicola Coulson Cllr Sarah Wyatt Cllr Julia Wingate Cllr Mark Goodey Cllr Sam Dennis Kim Willis Alex Robertson Catherine Gillen	Chair Pebbles Group Vice-Chair, Kingsbridge Cornerstone Photography Treasurer Secretary Associate Committee Member, Modbury Parish Council Associate Committee Member, Kingsbr. Town Council, Mayor Associate Committee Member, Salc. Town Council, Mayor Associate Committee Member, SHDC Committee Member, Marketing Manager Committee Member, IT Workhouse Committee Member, The Brownston Gallery
Apologies:	Jane Tyler Cllr Steve Mammatt Cllr Jasper Evans Sarah Burnett Cllr Mark Long Dawn Blundell	Committee Member, The Winking Prawn Group Associate Committee Member, Kingsbr. Town Council Associate Committee Member, Salc. Town Council Associate Committee Member, KCC Salcombe Info Centre Associate Committee Member, SHDC (esp. Planning) & Salcombe Harbour Committee Associate Committee Member, Kingsbridge Info Centre
Absent:	Cllr Rufus Gilbert	Associate Committee Member, Devon County Council
Guests:	Georgie Leonard Bradley Gerrard Adam Taylor Andrea Scanlon	Bocchinelli Freelance journalist copywriter Taylored Games You, Your House & I

2. Minutes & Actions

Minutes from January 2025 approved (with some actions pending).

Actions outstanding previously and ongoing

- | | |
|---|-------|
| 1. Website: Phase 1 completion by mid-Jan 2025, with testing & adjustments before launch. | SBa |
| - SBa to test and confirm Stripe's direct debit capabilities. | |
| - SB to confirm costs for hosting and maintenance, and integration with CRM tools like MailChimp. | |
| - Develop a detailed communication strategy for transitioning members. | KW |
| 2. Member Survey: Draft to gather feedback and agree content. To send out via Survey Monkey.
<i>Update: Feedback form drafted and ready to be issued, pending approval.</i> | KW/NC |
| 3. Build on cross-Chamber collaborations - Ongoing | JS |
| Devolution | |
| 4. Monitor Devon County Council's decision regarding Local Authority restructuring & Devolution. | SD |
| 5. Ensure businesses are kept informed and engaged as the situation evolves. | |
| South Hams Chamber Website | |
| 6. KW to draft marketing plan for approval. | KW |
| 7. Ensure content is ready by 20th January. | JS/BG |
| 8. Provide training resources for committee members and administrators. | SBa |
| 9. Provide current member list for directory integration. | NC |
| 10. Decide on a renewal strategy (individual vs. fixed date). | All |
| 11. Test automation of renewal reminders before full rollout. | SBa |
| Jobs Fair | |
| 12. Develop communication materials (emails, FAQs) to guide members through the process. | KW |
| 13. Send reminder emails to local businesses. | KW |
| 14. Promote the jobs board in social media posts & newsletters. | KW |
| 15. Include it in every business meeting moving forward. | All |
| 16. March Business Club meeting - Invite Tina Graham & team from the school and use the meeting to demonstrate the jobs board and highlight its importance. | |
| 17. Print & distribute flyers with job board details. | KW |
| 18. Showcase the jobs board at events with a live demo. | |

19. Boost Employment Fair marketing - integrate jobs board promotion into the jobs fair campaign and ensure all businesses attending know about and are encouraged to use the board. KW

20. JS to invite Bradley Gerrard to join Committee. JS

3. Council reports

Salcombe Town Council (STC) - MG

- **Field of Lights** display was a huge success, raising over **£120k** - the largest amount raised during the 200th Anniversary by a lifeboat station in the UK without national support.
 - **Christmas and post-Christmas trade was unexpectedly strong**, with local traders reporting a very buoyant season, possibly boosted by the lights display.
 - **STC is preparing for devolution**, but there is limited information on progress.
-

A discussion ensued about **devolution and local government reorganisation in Devon**. Bradley Gerrard explained that the government is pushing forward with two separate but related processes:

1. Local Government Reorganisation

- Restructuring councils in county areas by replacing the two-tier system (county and district) with larger **unitary authorities**. Devon's currently has 11 councils, including two unitary ones (Torbay and Plymouth). The government wants to consolidate these into **2 to 4 larger councils**.

2. Devolution

- Introducing a **regional mayor** to oversee multiple unitary councils. Devon and Cornwall are seen as a natural pairing, but while Devon is neutral on the idea, Cornwall strongly opposes merging.

Timeline:

- Some areas in England will get fast-tracked devolution within two years, but the South West is not included. Instead, changes are expected within 3 to 5 years, likely around 2028 rather than 2027.

South Hams District Council:

- SHDC will not exist beyond 2027.

Plymouth's expansion

- Plymouth is looking to expand eastward, **possibly incorporating parts of the South Hams** to meet the government's 500,000 population target for councils.

Rest of Devon

- East, Mid & North Devon may merge with Exeter and Teignbridge.
- Exeter wants to remain independent, but other councils oppose this.
- Devon and Torbay have formed a devolved institution without a mayor, which some see as ineffective.

Political Considerations

- There is speculation that expanding Plymouth and Exeter too much could dilute Labour votes, so they may be allowed to remain smaller to preserve Labour majorities.

In summary, devolution and local government reorganisation in Devon are ongoing but unclear. The government is pushing for unitary councils, but exact timelines and structures are still uncertain.

Kingsbridge Town Council (KTC) - JW

- Efforts are underway to address **antisocial behaviour** at the recreation ground, working with SHDC to reconfigure the café to make the area less of a hub for such issues.
 - Usual concerns, including commercial **bin collection** on Fore Street.
 - **Trade in January** was stronger than expected, with a noticeable increase in both local and visitor footfall
-

Modbury Parish Council - BP | TP

- SW and CG reported that **Christmas trade was good**, but January has been quieter compared to Salcombe and Kingsbridge.
 - Many shops close on **Mondays and Tuesdays after Christmas**, which may have reduced visitor numbers.
 - SW announced that **Modbury secured a £10k grant for the play park** from SHDC, a significant boost for the community.
-

District & County: South Hams District Council | Devon County Council

South Hams District Council - SD

See Devolution & South Hams Chamber rebrand

4. Treasurer's Report

Overview

JG presented the **Treasurer's Report for Year Ended 31 December 2024**, outlining the Chamber's financial performance, key income sources, and ongoing challenges. He has not produced a 3-year forecast due to the uncertainty of the Chamber's ambition and spending plans.

Key Financial Highlights

Surplus

- 2023/24 surplus: £1,912.26, an improvement from £1,400 the previous year.
- This extra surplus reflects better financial management and revenue-generating initiatives.

Business Club Profitability

- A c.10% levy was added to event costs, generating a net gain of over £800.
- Previously, business club events barely covered costs, with some making as little as £5 profit.
- More rigorous control over free meal allocations has contributed to improved margins.

Banking & Interest Income

- Two bank accounts: a current account and an interest-bearing account with HSBC.
- £3,500 transferred from the current account to the interest account, leading to increased interest earnings:
 - £104 interest (early 2024), compared to £46 the previous year.
 - Before that, interest income was as low as £5 due to low interest rates.
- **Frustrations with HSBC:** JG noted that, despite efforts over two years, he is still not the primary user on the account, suggesting a potential switch to another bank.

2025 Budget & Financial Forecast

A balanced budget was shown for 2025.

Break-even Point | Membership

- The budget balances only if membership numbers remain steady and the subscription increase (from £65 to £70) is maintained.
- Membership numbers have declined by approximately 20% since 2023, continuing a downward trend from 2022.
- The Chamber's income is heavily dependent on membership subscriptions, and further losses could jeopardise financial stability.

Income & Expenditure Projections

- Projected total income: c.£13,500.
- Core administrative expenses: c.£10,000, covering week-to-week running costs.
- Remaining surplus: £3,000, but much of this is allocated to key activities such as the AGM and business events.
- Limited funds for discretionary spending, including charitable donations (set at £600, in line with the previous year).

Website Rebuild

- The Chamber is investing in a website rebuild, impacting financial flexibility.
- £1,900 is allocated in the 2025 budget.
- A grant of £1,900 will match fund this but this is not yet factored into the budget.

Business Club Event Attendance

- Event revenue has increased from £3,200 in 2023 to £3,800 in 2024
- Attendance appears stable, suggesting that event popularity has not declined despite the 10% price increase
- However, converting event attendees into full-time members remains a challenge.

South Hams Chamber Brand Expansion

- No financial allowance arising from the South Hams Chamber rebranding has been included in the budget.

Treasurer's Recommendation

JG considers it prudent to retain a healthy annual surplus. Therefore, he proposes implementing a series of modest annual increases, broadly in line with inflation, to the membership subscription rate, at a rate to be agreed by committee prior to the AGM.

Growing the Membership

Following on from JG's presentation, the discussion revolved around how to increase chamber membership, improve engagement, and enhance networking opportunities.

- MG raised the point that Dartmouth's chamber membership was flourishing, prompting questions about what they were doing differently. Some speculated that it was easier for a new chamber to grow from zero, but the key issue was understanding what strategies Dartmouth was using that could be adopted.
 - Andrea Scanlon, a new member, shared her perspective on joining. She had attended a previous business meeting and found value in the events, which motivated her to become a member. She noted the
-

membership fee discrepancy (£65 listed online vs. £70 for directors) but emphasised that the value of membership outweighed the cost.

- There was general agreement that the chamber should actively target potential members and reconnect with those who had lapsed. JS suggested a review of past members who had dropped off, as many might not even realise their membership had lapsed. If businesses were currently willing to invest in advertising and promotional activities, they might also be open to rejoining the chamber with the right outreach.

Event Structure & Networking Opportunities

- Several members discussed the challenges and benefits of the chamber's bi-monthly Business Clubs. The structured format was appreciated, but some found it difficult to network effectively due to the large number of attendees.

Ideas for Improving Networking & Events

- **Informal Networking Events:** Andrea suggested adding a less structured networking event on alternate months, such as casual meetups over drinks for a small fee. These could facilitate open discussions where small business owners could exchange ideas and collaborate.
- **Industry-Specific Meetings:** JW proposed categorising meetings by business sector to make them more relevant for attendees. She noted that if businesses saw key competitors or peers in a group, they might be more inclined to join.
- **Breakfast Meetings:** Andrea and KW suggested hosting breakfast meetings to attract different audiences and provide an alternative format for engagement.
- **Thematic or Knowledge-Based Events:** NC highlighted that past events on general business topics (e.g., coaching) had broad appeal. Events covering new regulations, digital marketing, or financial strategies could attract more diverse attendees.

Online Forum & Digital Engagement

- SBa introduced the upcoming chamber website, which will include an online forum for members to discuss industry-specific issues, share advice, and collaborate. The forum would be categorised by topics such as retail, accommodation, and other sectors.
- JW shared her experience with Toymaster, a nationwide toy shop forum, which allows members to discuss industry trends, pricing, and inventory strategies. She explained that such platforms help businesses feel connected to a larger network and provide valuable insights.
- However, some members questioned whether online forums could replace in-person engagement. NC pointed out that while digital spaces are useful, many business owners still prefer face-to-face interactions. The consensus was that forums should supplement, not replace, in-person meetings.

Business Collaboration & Community Building

- A key theme of the discussion was fostering collaboration rather than competition among businesses. JW emphasised that similar businesses (e.g., two toy shops in the same area) could work together rather than undercutting each other. By cooperating, businesses could maintain fair pricing and ensure mutual success.
- This concept extended to accommodation providers and other industries, where once one business reaches full capacity, the overflow naturally benefits competitors. Encouraging a supportive business community was seen as a long-term strategy for sustainability.

Membership Drive & Admin Follow-Up

The discussion concluded with a proposed action:

- Conduct an administrative review of lapsed members and reach out to them.
- Encourage each existing member to sign up one new business per month.
- Utilise industry groupings as a recruitment tool (e.g., inviting all local hotels to join if key players are already members).

JS noted that membership outreach should be a priority, as many businesses might rejoin with just a small nudge. There was general enthusiasm for a proactive membership drive, a mix of structured and informal networking events, and leveraging online tools to enhance engagement. By refining event formats, improving outreach, and fostering collaboration among businesses, the chamber could strengthen its role in the local business community and boost membership.

Actions:

21. Administrative review of members that have left over the last 3 years

NC

Annual Membership | Payments

A discussion ensued about refining the payment and invoicing process and the idea of possible fee adjustments. Several concerns and potential improvements were raised:

1. Payment Process & Member Awareness

- Membership fees are collected via direct debit, meaning businesses are not issued invoices as standard practice. Some members expressed that they often forget they've paid their membership because they don't receive regular payment notifications. If someone else manages a business's finances, the lack of invoices or receipts can make it unclear whether a payment has been made.
-

- Some members only notice their membership payment when it appears in their accounting software, which may not provide sufficient awareness.
- When signing up, members agree to a continuous membership unless they actively cancel. They must provide notice (approximately three weeks) to terminate their membership.

2. Growing Demand for Invoices

- Over the past two weeks, there has been a noticeable rise in members requesting invoices as proof of payment. This has not been a common request before.
- Given the demand, the Chamber may need to introduce a system for providing invoices or receipts.

3. Membership Growth & Engagement

A suggestion was made that the Chamber should leverage its existing members to help grow the organisation. If each existing member brought in just one new member, the Chamber could significantly increase its membership and continue to foster community.

4. Fairness of Membership Fees

- Andrea raised her concern that as a sole trader (one-person business), she pays the same membership fee as a larger company, which might not seem fair. She suggested that membership pricing could consider the number of representatives a company sends to meetings or the size of their business.

5. Next Steps

- The discussion was cut short to stay on schedule, but committee were encouraged to take ownership of ideas and push forward initiatives without waiting for formal leadership directives.

1. Financial Statements

Report dated 31st December 2024

Account Balances

Current Account balance	£11,581.12	
(Modbury funds)	(£4,766.98)	
(Kingsbridge Traders)	(£2,573.00)	
Current Account Net Total	£4,241.14	
Deposit Account	£6,819.01	
Total Balance	£11,060.15	(November balance = £15,663.11)

Monthly Income/Expenditure Statement - as previously circulated.

Donations

Date	Beneficiary	Amount
24 March	KCC Jobs Board	£200.00
29 March	KB Easter Egg Hunt	£204.00
12 May	KB Classic Rallies	£200.00
	<i>Agreed 2024 donations limit</i>	<i>£1,450.00</i>
	<i>Current expenditure</i>	<i>(£604.00)</i>
	<i>Remaining balance</i>	<i>£846.00</i>

5. Ongoing Projects

South Hams Chamber Rebrand

Background

- With SHDC abolished, the significance of “South Hams” as a business identity could be diminished. There is concern that economic activity could shift towards larger urban areas like Plymouth, impacting local businesses.
- Some argue that the South Hams identity, rooted in history and geography, will remain relevant regardless of government restructuring.
- The existing SHDC Economic Development business unit for the South Hams will cease.
- The Chamber needs to consider how, as South Hams Chamber, if and how it might effectively represent South Hams businesses moving forward, in the absence of SHDC. All agreed that a **strong, unified South Hams business voice will be critical** in engaging with the new unitary authority.
- Some members and associate members recognise that greater community dependence on parish and town councils will arise; also other local organisations.
- Some members fear smaller towns like Kingsbridge and Modbury could be overshadowed by larger towns like Totnes and Dartmouth if they merge into a larger South Hams Chamber.
- There is general agreement that a well-structured South Hams Chamber could provide businesses with stronger advocacy and marketing advantages compared to fragmented local chambers.

Vision option #1

JS spoke on a hybrid model option, which had been circulated by email previously, which seeks to meet the needs of the landscape rolling out ahead of committee, accounting for the need for local business community representation with a district-wide organisational strategy. Key elements include:

1. Maintaining Local Chambers

- Existing town-specific chambers (e.g. Kingsbridge, Salcombe & Modbury, and Dartmouth) will continue to operate independently with their own events and memberships.
- These chambers will send representatives to a newly structured South Hams Chamber Executive Committee, which will meet quarterly to ensure local voices are heard.

2. Creating a District-Wide Online Forum

- A central online forum will serve as a networking and resource hub for businesses across the district.
- Local chambers can link to this platform from their own websites, providing value to their members.
- Some local chambers may choose to pay a nominal fee (e.g., £10 per member per year) for access to the online forum

3. Restructuring the South Hams Chamber Website

- The website will act as a shopfront for the district-wide chamber, distinguishing it from local chambers.
- Local chamber websites (e.g. Kingsbridge, Salcombe, Modbury) will be simplified to basic information pages that direct visitors to the South Hams Chamber for broader business support.

4. Financial Considerations

- The proposal aims to minimise costs by using existing physical and digital resources.
- Hosting fees are estimated at approximately £240 per year, which is manageable without significant new expenses, compared to existing estimate at £120 per year.

5. Political Voice and Advocacy

- A unified South Hams Chamber will be positioned to engage more effectively with local and regional government bodies, particularly as the transition to a unitary authority progresses.
- Some chambers may focus on advocacy, while others prioritise business networking.

Next Steps

The next steps are to consider alternative options and gathering feedback and builds on the first option.

Actions:

22. Members to provide feedback on the proposal.

Website

Deferred to March meeting

Jobs Board

Deferred to March meeting

South Hams Employment Fair

- Committee asked to promote the Employment Fair to other member businesses and beyond. All
-

6. The month ahead

7. AOB

1. Parking | “Tourism Tax”

- Business owners, JW, Adam Taylor and Andrea Scanlon were invited to give their opinions on the proposed two-tier parking system. They voiced strong opposition to Kingsbridge’s decision to implement a two-tier parking system, charging visitors more than locals.
- Concerns were raised that this would discourage visitors, impact footfall, and ultimately harm local businesses that rely on both tourists and regional customers.

Negative Impact on Local Businesses and Events

- Adam explained that his business on Fore Street attracts customers from Plymouth, Torbay, Exeter, and beyond (as far as Oxford), many of whom make high-value purchases. He warned that higher parking costs could cause visitors to shorten their trips or shop elsewhere, such as Drake Circus in Plymouth, where parking is more convenient and affordable.
 - Weekend-long gaming tournaments and other events bring people into Kingsbridge, benefiting accommodation providers, cafés, and shops, but increased parking charges could reduce attendance.
 - Businesses such as Catch of the Day similarly draw customers from outside the area, who may reconsider visiting if they feel unfairly charged for parking.
 - Andrea described the policy as a “PR disaster”, stating it undermines years of work to bridge the gap between tourists and locals. She argued that visitors’ first impression of the town could now be negative, as they may feel unwelcome due to higher parking fees. Suggested alternative pricing strategies, such as seasonal peak, mid, and low rates, which would be fairer for all rather than creating a divisive system of locals vs. visitors.
-

-
- JW agreed, emphasising that the two-tier system fosters a “them and us” mentality, which is damaging for tourism and local businesses.

Chamber of Commerce’s Position and Wider Resistance

- JS confirmed that the Kingsbridge and Modbury opposed the policy, while Kingsbridge Town Council supported it.
- NC reported that Dartmouth, Ivybridge and Totnes businesses were actively organising resistance and had reached out for support.
- There was general agreement that the chamber should stand with other business groups in opposing the policy, but no one volunteered as a spokesperson to lead the campaign.
- SD acknowledged that most businesses accepted that parking charges needed to rise but felt the increase should have been evenly applied rather than through a complicated two-tier system.
- SBa and Adam highlighted the importance of keeping parking affordable, especially for areas like Fore Street, where reasonable parking rates currently attract visitors.
- JW stressed that Kingsbridge should focus on promoting its unique selling points to counteract the negative impact of the parking changes.

Actions

- | | |
|---|----|
| 32. JS confirmed that the chamber would write a formal letter within 24 hours, opposing the two-tier system. | NC |
| 33. Discussions would continue finding a business representative to lead opposition efforts. | |
| 34. The chamber also committed to promoting the towns’ benefits to help mitigate potential damage to visitor numbers. | |

-
2. Membership | Administrative Support - *ongoing*
 3. Tesco Planning application

Date of next meeting: Wednesday 5th March 2025
